



“SMOKE DETECTORS SAVE LIVES” is a phrase that is often heard, but unfortunately seldom heeded. The State Fire Marshal's Office, the Delaware Volunteer Firemen's Association and individual fire companies have been conducting and supporting fire prevention programs to drive this message home to the residents of our state. Unfortunately for many, this message was not being heard. Statistics for fire deaths in Delaware have mirrored national statistics. Ninety percent of single family homes across the United States have at least one smoke detector installed according to the National Fire Protection Association. Alarming, thirty percent of these homes are equipped with non-operational detectors due to missing or dead batteries. NFPA figures also reveal that over 65% of fatal fires occur in those 10% of the homes that are not protected with smoke detectors. This is an astonishing statistic.

Two recent tragedies in Sussex County have helped raise the awareness level of the public concerning the importance of smoke detectors. In October 2000, 5 members of the Mitchell family perished in a Broadkill Beach home that had no smoke detectors. In January 2001, 11 members of the Shelton family perished in their Oak Orchard home in an early morning fire. This fatal fire was the largest loss of life from a fire in a single incident in Delaware. The Oak Orchard investigation revealed that the home was equipped with smoke detectors, but they were rendered useless because the batteries had been removed. In both of these investigations it was determined that an early warning device, such as a functional smoke detector, likely would have prevented any loss of life.

These disturbing stories shocked the public, and they realized “it really could happen to me”. The demand for smoke detectors became overwhelming. Stores could not keep smoke detectors on the shelves. The fires had a ripple effect throughout the country resulting in an increased demand for detectors. The State Fire Marshal's Office, Delaware Volunteer Firemen's Association and the fire companies banded together and organized smoke detector give-aways. Local businesses stepped up to the forefront and assisted monetarily and with advertising. Could it be that we finally had the solution? Unfortunately not! Astonishingly, after all the organized efforts to distribute smoke detectors, and following all of the media attention, the message still is not getting through. Delaware State Fire Marshal's Office statistics reveal that over 50% of the single family homes that experienced a fire that the Fire Marshal's Office investigated did not contain a working smoke detector.

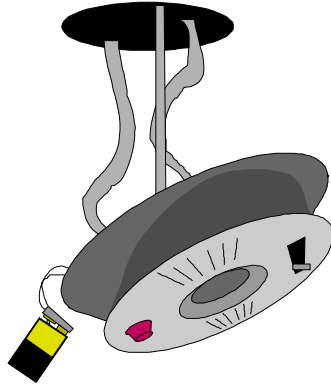
After reviewing these harrowing statistics, former State Fire Marshal Daniel R. Kiley, formed an alliance with the fire service and local churches in an effort to reach those families that were not made aware of the need for smoke detectors. A successful initiative originating from the Shelton family's church in Oak Orchard proved to be a success. Governor Ruth Ann Minner was the featured speaker, and she lent her support to the program. Fire service/church initiatives are planned for September and October in Kent and New Castle counties.

Eight months have passed since the worst loss of life from fire in Delaware history. Legislative initiatives are underway to continue to reach all families in the State and provide those who cannot afford to protect themselves against the perils of fire with smoke detectors. House Bill 216, which will provide hard wired smoke detectors to low income families, is awaiting passage in the Senate when they return in September. This very important legislation will make an immediate impact on fire safety in Delaware.

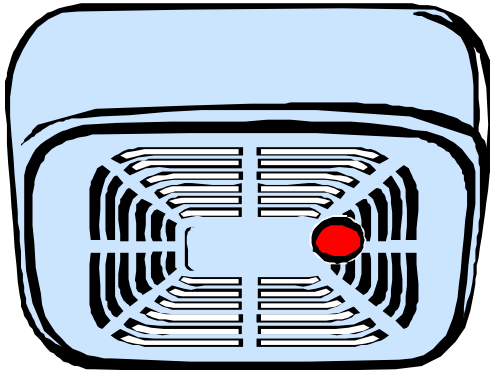
As time goes by, the memories of the Mitchell and Shelton tragedies begin to fade. People become complacent and refuse to believe that “it can happen to them”. Those of us in the fire service know better. We know it can happen to any one of us. Fire and its devastation does not discriminate. We see the results of this devastation everyday.

We must “keep the iron hot” and not allow the memories of these tragedies to fade in the minds of the public. We in the fire service know that smoke detectors do save lives, **BUT THEY MUST BE WORKING SMOKE DETECTORS!**

~Willard F. Preston III
State Fire Marshal



**Besure to install
and check
batteries!**



**Make sure smoke
detectors are
properly
installed!!**



**Smoke
Detector after
fire...**